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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: USAID MISSION DIRECTOR VISITS DASHOGUZ
PROVINCE

[1](#)1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

[1](#)2. (U) SUMMARY: During his December 17 meeting with USAID Regional Mission Director Bill Frej, a warm and cordial Dashoguz First Deputy Governor Atajykov thanked Frej for USAID's support for private enterprise in Dashoguz province and expressed a desire to continue current cooperation in this area. Atajykov highlighted the importance placed by the government on improving rural livelihoods, and stated it was the government's duty to support these policies. Two local government representatives accompanied the delegation for the entire program of site visits to USAID-funded civil society and agricultural support centers, an infrastructure project supported by USAID's Water Users' Associations program, and a USAID/Winrock-supported cheese producer. They appeared impressed by the range of work undertaken by local communities and businesspeople with USAID's support. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)3. (U) As part of his initial visit to Turkmenistan, USAID Regional Mission Director Bill Frej traveled to Dashoguz province to meet with local government officials and monitor USAID's ongoing programs. In a meeting with first Deputy Governor Atajykov, Frej expressed his thanks for the productive relationship that USAID's partners have enjoyed in Dashoguz province and provided an overview of the day's visits. (NOTE: Governor Saparmyrat Ashyrov, who in past meetings has been positive and supportive of USAID's activities, was called to Ashgabat for a Cabinet of Ministers' meeting that same day. END NOTE.) In return, Atajykov thanked Frej several times for USAID's support for private businesses, which improves the well-being of the local population. He stressed that it was the government's duty to support the development of the private sector, and that both sides shared a common goal in this regard. Prior to joining the provincial government, he worked in the water department, and so was familiar with USAID's earlier activities in the province, including the construction of a drinking water plant in the 1990s. He reiterated the importance of USAID's work supporting small-scale processing, since Dashoguz farmers have many raw materials, but limited access to new processing equipment.

COUNTERPART'S SUPPORT CENTER: VALUABLE RESOURCE FOR CIVIC ACTORS

14. (U) Frej visited USAID/Counterpart's Dashoguz Civil Society Support Center (CSSC), which was opened in 1998 within the framework of USAID's NGO Initiative Support Program. The Dashoguz CSSC provides computer, Internet, information support, training, library and other services to local NGOs, communities, and other groups from the province. Additionally, the CSSC also supports a local network of Community Resource Points and Resource Center (5 Centers) and provides capacity building services to them. Currently, the center is supported by the USAID/Counterpart Community Empowerment Program, whose goal is to increase the skills of citizens' groups within Turkmen society who seek greater participation in local governance at the community level. Under the program, the CSSC provides technical assistance to 12 communities located in six counties across the province. Frej learned that the Dashoguz CSSC staff has already applied to the Ministry of Justice for registration as an NGO twice, as part of an effort to legalize the center's operations. Although unsuccessful to date, the center's leadership intends to continue to pursue registration.

TAGT COOPERATIVE: AGRICULTURAL SUPPORT FOR LOCAL FARMERS

15. (U) The Frej delegation also traveled to the agricultural cooperative "Tagt" in Gerogly district. Founded in 1997 with support from the German technical cooperation agency GTZ, Tagt partnered with Counterpart International in 2006 to implement USAID's Water-User Association assistance program in Dashoguz welayat. Through this project, Counterpart International provided an 8-month institutional grant to establish an Agricultural Support Center on the cooperative's base with the goal of strengthening the capacity of farmer organizations in Dashoguz province and increasing farmers' income. Frej met with cooperative members, toured the

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facility and heard a presentation on the group's history and recent accomplishments.

WINROCK SUPPORTS LEADING PRIVATE CHEESE PRODUCER

16. (U) The Chowdurbayev family established its private dairy business in 1999 in Gubadag district, about 30 kilometers from Dashoguz city. Mr. Chowdurbayev, a 2001 participant in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Cochran Fellowship program, originally produced 30-40 kg of cheese per week with six employees, but has expanded to current production levels of 150 kg of cheese per day that is manually packed via vacuum machine and transferred by air to Ashgabat. This increase represents a daily sales level of what the farm used to sell in one month, yet the firm still cannot meet the market's demand for its product, a gouda-type cheese.

17. (U) Frej also heard from the owner's son, who currently serves as sales and marketing director, about past assistance received by the firm via Farmer-to-Farmer volunteers from USAID/Winrock International. In 2004, the host's cheese started to mold during production due to the lack of preservative coating, which resulted in significant financial losses. The plant also faced difficulties with storage and promotion of finished commodities. After being approached by Winrock Turkmenistan regarding potential assistance, "Farmer-to-Farmer" (FTF) volunteer-experts helped the host to improve the cheese production and marketing skills which resulted in almost doubling of its sales. Further support assisted the employees of the cheese plant to adequately reduce the cheese processing time, thus saving time and electricity, improving the cheese's body and increasing yields. The family is now building a second plant in another milk-producing district in the province due to strong demand in the Dashoguz province and Ashgabat markets.

LOCAL COMMUNITY'S ROAD-BUILDING PROJECT OPENS NEW DOORS

18. (U) Frej also visited the isolated village of Baydag, which has a population of 1,900 people. Since 2006, the community has been actively involved in the implementation of USAID-funded programs in Turkmenistan. During the previous Civil Society Support Initiative program, which ended in September 2006, the community implemented two community projects. The first project mobilized rural residents

to reconstruct 2.4 kilometers of road, which shortened the travel time for villagers to the main highway. The second project expanded the community's access to information by setting up a Community Resource Point with three computers in the village. The assembled community members described for Frej the process through which they joined together to carry out their projects, and shared their experience in working with local government officials. In expressing his thanks for USAID's contributions, one community elder said with a smile, "Some people go on Hajj to Mecca and Medina, but if you are able to send me to the U.S., I'll return and tell everyone about the good things your country has done for us."

¶9. (U) COMMENT: USAID assistance in Dashoguz province is having a tangible impact on people's livelihoods. First Deputy Governor Atajykov acknowledged this point during his meeting with Frej and expressed his desire to see the cooperation continue. The project beneficiaries visited spoke positively of their relations with local governments, how the projects had helped them to better understand their respective roles in a democratic society, and their ambitious goals for the future. This demonstrates the positive results of the community-based approach to development that was adopted after USAID shifted its approach away from more traditional NGO registration and organizational development activities following passage of the 2003 Law on NGOs. USAID's Community Empowerment Project is continuing its previous work in Dashoguz province, and is looking to expand its cooperative relations with local authorities with a focus on service delivery improvement. The recently launched AgLinks agricultural support project is well positioned to support local economic development initiatives in rural areas through its support for private farmers' groups. END COMMENT.

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¶10. (U) USAID Regional Director William Frej cleared this cable.

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